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WOMEN IN THE MOSLEM WORLD

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Women in the Moslem World

by MADAME AHMED HUSSEIN

NOTE: *This text is based upon a lecture delivered by Madame Hussein, wife of the Egyptian Ambassador to the United States, at the University of Chicago in June, 1954, under the auspices of the Gertrude Dudley Lecture Foundation.*

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Women in the Moslem World

Perhaps I should warn you at the outset that I do not claim to be an authority on this topic—Women in the Moslem World. It would take many more years and much fuller application than I can afford, to become a specialist in such a field. The reason for that, as you must realize, is that the Moslem World is neither a confined nor a homogeneous entity. Its lands are spread over the three large continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. Its peoples belong to a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Political status, social structures and living conditions of Moslem communities vary greatly as one travels East from Albania or Yugoslavia through Turkey and Iran to Pakistan or the Philippines. The same thing would hold true should one stop on the way back in Indonesia, Madagascar, the Sudan, Nigeria or North Africa.

Few people are aware of the fact that Moslem communities are so widely spread. Furthermore, fewer people know that over 50 million Moslems, for instance, are Russians and Chinese existing behind the iron curtain.

All in all, there are today about 400 million Moslems, populating an area more than three times that of the United States. The one binding tie among these peoples, in a sense, is their religion. And the heart of this sprawling body of communities, from that point of view, is the Arab World, where Islam, in its ultimate form, was born over thirteen centuries ago. When I say "in its ultimate form", I do so advisedly. For to the Moslems, Islam was not a new creed, but rather the continuation of the same faith ordained by the one God for all mankind since the creation, and delivered by a chain of prophets and messengers which included Abraham, Noah, Moses and Jesus down the ages to Mohammed.

As Islam spread around from its birthplace, the Arabian Peninsula, to the three continents of the old world, it brought about, in varying degrees, great upheavals in the thought and actions of the peoples it affected. Many customs and traditions underwent complete transformation, while some persisted in either their original or in new modified forms. This explains in part the non-uniform patterns of social behaviour in the different parts of the Moslem World. I may also add that, as time went on, and due to various external and internal social and political pressures, some Moslem communities drifted fur-

A shepherdess tending "a lost sheep".

ther apart from the general trend of social developments in the heart of the Moslem World. As a result, it would be difficult and rather misleading to make any generalizations about women in the Moslem World today.

What makes my task even more difficult, in addressing a Western audience, is the fact that the Moslem World seems for centuries to have been somewhat misrepresented and misinterpreted in the West; possibly as a result of medieval religious rivalries, or purposeful colonial interests; or perhaps the reliance of the Western public for some time on the Arabian Nights as a source of information. As regards the status of women, the Western conception seems to have

conveniently reduced it to a simple triangle — veils, harems and polygamy.

But certainly the Moslem World that I know is not so romantic. Its two hundred million women are far removed from such an atmosphere of fables. Instead, they participate in the care and partake of the burdens of a none too romantic life in their communities.

Our topic being so wide, I will attempt to deal with it in the following manner. First, I will try to cite briefly some of the moral and legal gains that were established for women by Islam. Next, I will try to expose some of the misconceptions circulated in the West about women in the Moslem World. Finally, I shall attempt to give you a bird's eye view of what some women do in one part of the Moslem World, namely Egypt, my homeland, with which I am more familiar and on which I can speak with the strength of first-hand experience.

In order to properly assess the effect of Islam on the status of women, one must go back to pre-Islamic conditions. For one, histo-

Students at the University of Cairo with Dr. Elizabeth Lam, visiting American educator—1953.

Dr. Kawkab Nassif (a woman doctor) in the operating room.

rians tell us that women in pagan Arabia and similar communities were considered by men to be accessories and possessions that could be bought, sold and inherited. Multiple marriage was quite customary among the pagan Arabs as well as among earlier communities. Testimony for this fact is recorded in the Bible, which repeatedly relates that many of the Jewish Kings had more than one wife. Furthermore, some Arabian tribes in those days went even further in their bigotry: they buried alive their unwanted newly born females.

In a very few years, and by a succession of decisive blows, Islam succeeded in destroying this order of affairs. It first recognized woman as an independent being and gave her a most liberal bill of rights and responsibilities. It established her legal personality and allowed her to keep her family name after marriage. It granted her the right to possess property and to dispose of it freely as she wished,

The Society for the Welfare of Mothers and Babies, Sharia Malaka, Cairo—May 1954.

without the intermediary of a husband or a male guardian. It went further to allow her to become herself a guardian over minors. It also granted her the right to undertake trades and professions, and to sue others in courts without having to secure the husband's approval.

Such drastic and swift changes in woman's legal, economic and social rights, when judged by any criteria of social change could be termed nothing less than revolutionary. Actually, corresponding advance in the emancipation of women in Europe did not take place until many centuries later.

While it is true that Islam legislated that a woman inherits from her parents the equivalent of only half of her brother's share, this was a liberal innovation at the time. Prior to this Islamic law these women had enjoyed no right of inheritance at all. Moreover, the Moslem woman is not required to spend a penny of her personal income in support of household or children. The man bears the full financial responsibility in the family.

Moreover, the fair and objective analyst cannot but admire the

Two Egyptian farm women carrying water.

exalted position in social relations to which Islam meant to elevate women. The Quran speaks of the relationship between men and women in uncompromising terms. It portrays this relationship as one of mutual confidence, affection and compassion. Mohammed, the Prophet, is quoted as having said, on one occasion, "The most perfect among the believers are those who are kindest to their womenfolk," and, on another, "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers." The direct inference from such statements is one that makes fair treatment of women an article of faith in Islam.

Furthermore, one of the earliest injunctions of Islam was to

make it the duty of every Moslem man and woman to seek knowledge and acquire an education. The fruits of such a progressive order were strikingly apparent in the important intellectual role that was played by some Moslem women. As early as the first few decades of Islam, Aisha, the Prophet's wife, rose to such distinction as to be sought and consulted by men for her knowledge in theology and Islamic Law. In twelfth century Baghdad, Shuhda, better known as the "Glory of

Madame Nahid Sirry (seated), chosen Ideal Egyptian Mother of the year 1954, is now touring the United States.

Egyptian farm woman.

Women", was one of the foremost scholars of her age. She lectured in university mosques and handed diplomas to famous men of her time. In the field of spiritual achievement, some Moslem women also rose to positions of leadership. Rabia Al-Adawiya, for instance, who was a great mystic in Basra in the eighth century, lived to deserve the title of saint, and her spiritual example and guidance inspired many of her contemporaries and followers of both sexes for many generations.

As a matter of fact, if I may elaborate on this point a bit, Islam did not prohibit women from participating in public and social life. The records show that in the early days of Islam women appeared at public functions, studied and taught in schools, traded in markets, sat on consultative councils of state, and even fought on the battlefields by the side of men.

Contrary to the widely spread belief, Islam did not order the seclusion of women. Historians tell us that this custom was borrowed from Byzantium much later and mainly after Moslem society had become wealthier and more sophisticated. It was only then that Moslem women began to be deprived of a life of public usefulness and were relegated to the recesses of comfortable homes.

It is equally a fact that Islam could not be held responsible for the institution of veiling women's faces. There is today ample solid proof that the veil was an ancient Babylonian custom. Inscriptions on some relics of the Assyrian civilization, which preceded Islam by many centuries, portray women and goddesses wearing veils.

At Fuad I Maternity Hospital, Cairo, the staff and the patients are almost all women.

Annual Sports Parade of the Institute of Physical Culture at the Teachers' Club, Gezira, Cairo—January 1954.

The veil, which did not exist in Arabia in the early days of Islam, became fashionable centuries later in Persia, Turkey and other predominantly Moslem countries. A regressive move, it was introduced as a mark of class distinction. It was used to differentiate the free woman from the slave girl who was exposed to public scrutiny in market-places. As such, the veil was used by Christians and Moslems alike in Middle Eastern society. Yet it was applied only to the rich and middle classes. Meanwhile the poorer village and city women, who formed the vast majority of the female population and whose economic conditions required them to pitch in and cooperate with their men in earning their daily bread, lived through this stage for centuries, unfettered by veil and seclusion.

Much controversy has been raised, perhaps unnecessarily, about the question of polygamy in Islam. I have mentioned earlier that mul-

tiple marriage as an institution was well established long before the time of Mohammed. Some critics argued that Islam accepted or condoned that practice. In answer to these, some defenders of Islam declared that there existed a good reason, in a universal religion, for not barring the principle of such a practice. They suggested that under certain possible circumstances, multiple marriage could become a social necessity, though it be in the form of the lesser of two evils. They cited for example, among other things, the situation that may obtain in the aftermath of a devastating war that causes grave unbalance in the numbers of men and women in the marrying age, or the case of a man whose first wife falls victim to some incurable and incapacitating sickness.

More important, however, is to note that the basic teachings of Islam, in letter and spirit, moved vigorously to check and discourage

Cairo University class in Archeology.

A shepherdess.

polygamy. A fundamental verse in the Quran on the subject reads: "Take in matrimony two, three, or four wives. If you fear that you may not be fair to them, then marry only one . . . and you will never be fair, no matter how hard you try."

It is evident that the license to marry up to four wives, which represented a limitation on former customary practice anyway, was virtually annulled by the divine injunction to marry only one and by explaining away the chances of equitable treatment of two or more wives. However, and in spite of this clear interpretation of the text, the liberty of marrying more than one wife has been preserved in most Moslem communities. Its practice, though, I am happy to say, is quite insignificant in numbers.

It may be interesting to note that marriage, which is described in the Quran as "a tender relation based on reciprocal amity and kindness", is considered in Islam a civil contract. As to divorce, which the Prophet described as the most hateful of God's permitted things, one should note that the principle of its license is still debatable in most civilized society. If anything at all, it seems to be gaining recognition more and more, and is being accepted the world over as a necessity under certain circumstances. There is perhaps much to be said in favor of a marriage in which the partners do not feel forced by law or divine injunction to stick it out together come what may, but rather feel united by their own love, mutual interest and free will.

In order to protect women and deter men from the abuse of the right to divorce, Islamic Law imposes on the man the payment of an

Young Egyptian women watch a demonstration in an Alexandria Hospital.

Egyptian girl art student, Institute of Beaux Arts, Cairo.

alimony to the divorced woman and her children. This is assessed in proportion to their needs and his income. In further protection to the divorced woman's interests, the Law punishes the man who fails to pay the required alimony on schedule by sentencing him to jail. In Egyptian law, this is the only case where failure to pay a debt promptly is punished by imprisonment.

Finally, the arbitrary right of the man to divorce his wife under the Law is mitigated by the fact that she too can acquire an equal

power to divorce him by stipulating the inclusion of a single clause in the marriage contract. Furthermore, in Egypt, the wife can always get a divorce verdict if she shows in court that her married life is becoming impossible. In practice, divorce is quite frowned upon and resorted to only after all efforts of conciliation have failed.

So much for a general picture of the status of women in Islam. One may ask the question at this point of how representative of the problems facing Moslem women today are the issues of veil and seclusion, or the possible abuses of marriage and divorce laws. The truth of the matter is that such issues have for a long time been magnified out of proportion in public discussions, and have somehow obscured the real underlying problems that need more serious attention.

It does not take much time to discover that the real problems facing women in the Moslem world today are part and parcel of the general social and economic ills that affect both men and women in that world. These ills could have very little to do with the religious creed that one may follow. Nor could they be claimed to differentiate on the basis of sex.

Illiteracy, depressed economic conditions and low public health standards in most of the Moslem World today are the sour fruits of a colonial status that unfortunately arrested progress for centuries. The major job facing the people in those lands, people of all creeds, and males and females alike, is that of establishing a general social and economic uplift for one and all.

In Egypt, the movement for the emancipation of women was part of the general national movement for the liberation of the whole country at all levels, intellectual, political, social and economic. This general movement has been going on for the good part of a century. In its different phases, it had to cope with both foreign and domestic oppression and misrule. The words and deeds of such leaders as Jamal Eldine Elafghani, Mohamed Abdu, Qasim Amin, Princess Nazli Halim and Mrs. Huda Shaarawi, gave our feminist movement an early start and set it on the right course.

Thirty-one years have now passed since the first Egyptian society woman who dared defy conservatism dramatically cast her veil into the Mediterranean as she stepped out of the ship that brought her back from a women's conference in Rome. One by one, other society women followed Madame Shaarawi's example and pulled down that silken curtain that had separated their class from the free world.

Twentieth anniversary of the Cairo Women's Club—April 1954.

Today, I am happy to report to you, the veil is almost extinct in Egypt.

But even a few years before this process of unveiling the Egyptian beauties was started, our first group of suffragettes had appeared for the first time in a public demonstration. This happened in 1919, when they left their homes and marched the streets, not in defense of their personal rights, but in support of their men's demonstrations against British occupation forces. These forces at the time were threatening to shoot at public protest gatherings. By spearheading the men's procession, and facing the British guns, the suffragettes won the day for the country and offset the British ultimatum. During the following days they picketed government buildings and British stores and organized a successful boycott of British goods. Such was the courage and determination of Egyptian women when they were still covered by the romantic veil. This goes also to prove that the veil was permissive of progressive thinking and action, and was not necessarily a symbol of backwardness.

In February, 1922, Egypt received its first measure of partial liberation from British domination. This measure related only to civil and domestic affairs. Up to that year, 1922, and during forty years of full British control and administration of the public school system in Egypt, we were not provided with more than a single lonely high school for girls, to take care of the needs of the fair half of a population that numbered 14 millions. The total school enrollment then did not exceed 130,000, of whom only one-fifth were girls. During the past 32 years, we were able to increase that number fourteen-fold. Our school enrollment in the current academic year is slightly short of two millions, of whom more than one-third are girls.

This striking development, considering the short span of time in which it took place, was not restricted to number, but applied to kind, too. Secondary education has become wider in scope and more diversified with the establishment of technical and vocational schools for girls, such as schools for social work, home economics, commerce, fine arts and dramatics. Furthermore, the Cairo University, which was the first to be established in 1925, immediately following the relaxation of British controls, admitted its first group of girl students in 1929. Today we can boast of about 5,000 girls attending universities and women's higher institutes. Most of these are studying side by side with men in every field, including engineering colleges as well as medical schools. Many of these, when they graduate with distinction, are sent abroad on government scholarships to pursue post graduate studies. An interesting example is that of the daughter of an Azhar University teacher who, after graduating with honors in aeronautics, won herself an American fellowship and is now doing graduate work at Purdue University.

As may normally be expected, this progress, especially in its early stages, had to overcome various obstacles that were raised by some reactionaries, of whom we still have quite a few. Credit for the final achievement, however, must go to the perseverance and dedicated leadership of Madame Shaarawi and her Feminist Union and the ample support they received from liberal men of education like Dr. Taha Hussein, Mohamed El-Ashmawi and Lutfi El-Sayed. Only continuous and concerted efforts made it possible for our women to enjoy equal opportunities with men in all fields of learning.

One may mention here that an initial push for this expansion in education for both sexes was due in part at least to the deep and articulate belief of our intellectual leadership in the value of enlighten-

ment as an effective means of improving people's understanding of their religion and thereby correcting their interpretation of licenses such as polygamy or divorce. In this connection, one may add that polygamous practice does not seem to be such a serious problem in Egypt, inasmuch as (1) only three percent of all married men have more than one wife, and (2) the practice is perceptibly dwindling, especially among the educated groups. Similarly, the ratio of divorce to population has been decreasing over the last two decades and does not exceed at present seven in every thousand.

The fruits of one generation of education and emancipation of Egyptian women can perhaps be gauged best by the degree of their present participation in public and private services. Several hundred Egyptian female surgeons, lawyers, gynecologists, journalists and dentists are successfully practicing their professions in our big cities. There are women scholars and professors on the teaching staffs of several faculties in our three modern universities. Practically all the teachers in our grade and secondary girls' schools are females. Women are also employed by the Government in administrative and technical capacities in the Ministries of Education, Public Health and Social Affairs. The terms of their employment in these departments with regard to qualifications, responsibilities and remuneration are identical with those of their colleagues of the opposite sex. In some departments they have already attained the highest service grades.

It is also interesting to note that women in Egypt are now quite active in the fields of industry and trade. According to our latest staitstics there are close to 150,000 of them who are so engaged. For their protection, the Egyptian Government requires their employers to apply to them all the privileges and regulations that are standardly approved by the International Labor Organization of the United Nations. Egyptian labor legislation does not allow any discrimination against women in wages or working conditions.

What I want to emphasize here is the definite change in the general attitude of the Egyptian people towards women's rights and wrongs. Thirty years ago, a conservative man was shocked every time another woman cast away her veil. Today our Moslem women are rubbing shoulders and competing with men in almost all fields of work and recreation without meeting objections or causing any eyebrows to be raised. They have won several national championships in sports like swimming, horseback riding and marksmanship. Some of their tennis and basketball teams are competing favorably in international

Egyptian girls inspecting cotton fabrics to be shipped to Chicago for the First United States International Trade Fair.

tournaments. Meanwhile, our suffragettes are gaining ground in their campaign for voting rights. The national committee of our new Government which is drafting our new constitution has already granted the principle, and is working out the details on women's political rights.

To my mind, Egyptian women have so far done best by working hard in the social field. It can be truthfully said that they have contributed their share in bringing about the social consciousness which led to the social revolution which saved the country from certain chaos two years ago.

Examples of organized women's groups for social welfare in Egypt range from the old philanthropic and patronizing type to those using the most modern and democratic approaches in social work.

There are at least one hundred social organizations run entirely by women and receiving from the Government a great deal of help and support. Some of these were founded more than half a century ago, thanks to generous endowments by benevolent wealthy Moslems, men and women.

Other societies have sprung up in the wake of our national movement. First among these is the Feminist Union, which I have already mentioned. In addition to its intellectual feminist activities, the Union developed various social projects. The present president of the Feminist Union, Madame Sirry, is now touring the United States after having been chosen as Egypt's ideal mother of the year. Then there is the New Women Society. Among its various activities, the Society is known best for the dressmaking classes given to underprivileged girls. These classes have produced able seamstresses whose workshops are now nationally famous.

At the beginning of World War II, an important group of women were called upon to organize themselves into a women's branch or affiliate of the Red Crescent Association. While working as an independent unit, these women were very successful in the establishment of nursing schools, clinics and first-aid units. Together with "Mabarrat Muhamed Ali", another important organization, these ladies played a most indispensable role in the medical campaigns against cholera and malaria epidemics which invaded our country a few years ago. These ladies, most of whom came from the upper wealthy class, exhibited unusual courage and self-sacrifice in leaving their luxurious homes in Cairo and moving into tents in the most plague-stricken areas. They also worked with the same devotion in trying to alleviate the sufferings of the Arab refugees from Palestine.

Mention should also be made of the "Women's Society for Health Improvement", which specialized in a campaign against tuberculosis and in providing assistance to tubercular patients and their families. A fine settlement or preventorium was set up by this Society near the Pyramids of Giza. Hundreds of children from tubercular parents are housed in that settlement and are provided with a healthy atmosphere as well as elementary and vocational education. The fine management of this settlement is another tribute to the efficiency of the new Egyptian woman. Again, the secretary of this Society, Miss Lily Doss, is now touring America to study its different tuberculosis institutions.

Miss Sophie Andraos, Egyptian Fashion Designer—1953.

I could go on citing dozens of other examples of groups of Egyptian women working for the same aim, the uplift of the unfortunate or under-privileged groups of our population. But I shall limit myself to just one more example drawn from the work of a society in which, as a former member, I happen to be particularly interested. This is the Village Committee of the Cairo Women's Club, which was formed only four years ago. This Committee embarked on the experiment of working with village women in Sandyun, a village near Cairo.

It had been inconceivable that women who lived away from a village and were too busy to make daily trips to it could have been expected to do any worthwhile work along any social welfare lines. That had always been the problem facing the ever-increasing number of urban women who were strongly desirous of helping our poor Village Committees. The problem was solved when the Village Committee hit on the idea of working in cooperation with a rural social center. There were at the time about 160 such centers scattered all over the country.

A rural social center, as administered by the Fellah Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs, is an aided-self-help project of community development which, in addition to organizing villagers into

Egyptian girls work in Cairo downtown stores.

working teams for community improvement projects, offers local services such as clinical and maternity care, technical and vocational guidance and recreational activities. From our point of view, that was an ideal set-up for the Committee to work through in trying to reach the rural women.

We were happy to find that from the very first visit, we were received with the utmost enthusiasm both by the professional staff members and the villagers. We could immediately sense from the direct and sincere remarks of those people how appreciative they were of the social center and how friendly they felt towards the Government workers who helped them run it. To us, that represented a real achievement on the part of the Government in overcoming the traditional suspicious attitude of the peasant towards any governmental undertaking.

Encouraged by the reception we were awarded, we started working slowly and carefully. We followed conscientiously all the instructions of social experts concerning the democratic approach, and the patience and time to be taken in establishing friendships with the village women before involving them in any project. We would pay weekly visits to several homes, visit socially with the women, and listen to what they had to say without trying to project our own ideas.

Most of them, especially those whose husbands were active committee members in the center, expressed their enthusiasm and gratitude for what the social center had enabled them to do for their community in the short period of three years. Then they talked of what they, as women, could also do for themselves. At that point, we immediately offered our services to help them in whatever projects they would like to undertake.

It did not take us long to become persona grata with the village women. At the end of one year, Sandyun had its first Village Women's Committee which took up various organized activities such as sewing and knitting, the preparation of jams and preserves, etc. But the more important contribution of our Committee was the working out of a nursery school project for children from three to six years old, children who were usually left in the village streets and alleys, unprotected from filth, endemic diseases and delinquency.

The idea sounded like a far-fetched dream at the beginning. Within a few months, however, the dream had become a reality and Sandyun had its nursery school which transformed depressed little creatures into blooming children. It was the first such school to be set up in the long history of our Egyptian villages.

Sandyun's name rapidly rose to fame in the surrounding villages. One after the other representatives from different villages came pleading with us to start the same project in their respective communities. We seemed to have hit on the practical approach to meet an acute basic need. From Sandyun we moved on to Tersa, 10 miles away, where the second nursery school was set up.

Our nursery school was a simple and economical project, adapted to the conditions of the village people. It offered the minimum services required for these youngsters, such as food, clothing, daily bathing and recreation. It may sound incredible, but this program cost only fifteen dollars per child a year for food and clothing plus a maximum of another fifteen dollars for supervision expenses. The cost has to be kept at that level if we are to be able to develop the project and make it applicable on a national level. We cannot in Egypt afford at this point the luxury of spending money on expensive sample projects that can be admired and envied, but which are impossible to duplicate. The principle of financial participation by the villagers was also taken into consideration.

This nursery school soon became the center of gravity for wom-

en's participation. It proved to be an effective means of reaching the mother and the family through the child. It became very easy through it to organize the mothers into groups to participate in adult education classes, in child care and hygienic habits.

We are finally gratified that our nursery school was officially recognized by the authorities of the Ministry of Social Affairs as a successful project fit to be implemented in every rural social center. Already six nursery schools have sprung up in the past year in six neighboring villages. In some cases the idea was caught up by other groups of women. In other cases the village women themselves, guided by the health visitor in the center, have set up their own nursery school.

More promising still is the fact that in a conference recently organized by the Health Administration of the Fellah Department, the Cairo Women's Club, as well as the other agencies which subsequently worked on nursery schools in villages were called upon to pool all the information they had gained in their respective experiences, with a view to formulating a basic program for the rapid spread of nursery

Egyptian school girls at gymnastics.

A girls' school band.

schools all over Egypt. The United Nations World Health Organization's regional office was so favorably impressed that they decided to adopt this movement, and assumed the initial responsibility for establishing, as a first instalment in Egypt, thirteen nursery schools in one province.

Asked about the reason for such great enthusiasm, the W.H.O. officials explained to us that we had discovered for them an excellent approach to wipe out Bilharzia, a serious endemic disease in our country. They found out, they explained, that the village youngsters who were 3 to 6 years old were the most vulnerable group to the Bilharzia worm, and that the nursery schools, by caring for them and teaching them and their mothers hygienic habits, have reduced the incidence considerably. In other words, unintentionally, and as a by-product of our nursery schools, we furnished the W.H.O. and the country with a positive program that may finally check and eliminate a grave public health problem that has damaged the peasants' productivity and cost us incalculable sums of money for many, many years.

It made me very happy to learn, a few weeks ago, that the Egyptian Government has decided to prvoide every rural social center with a nursery school, and to help establish 200 more nursery-equipped rural social centers. This will bring the total to 375 social centers with nurseries, capable of serving one-third of our rural population. It is estimated that the expansion program will cost about forty million

dollars. Of course such revolutionary decisions were totally inconceivable until two years ago.

It is evident from the foregoing that women in a Moslem as in any other world have to face, and do grapple with, the problems that challenge their communities. Their participation in intellectual, social, economic or political activities is in no sense governed or restricted by religious injunctions. If that participation varies in degree or quality between two Moslem countries, or between a Moslem and a Christian community, the explanation must be sought and will be found in historical and social evolution rather than in the teachings of Christianity or Islam.

The impact of liberation movements, the spread of mass education and the concomitant social developments in the Moslem World over the last two or three generations have more and more been opening new avenues for our women to join in creative work. As time goes on, their responsibilities are becoming greater and their efforts more indispensable. They are being called upon to participate and

Fashion Show given by the Women's Liberation Society at the Agricultural Exhibition Grounds, Gezira, Cairo—May 1953.

cooperate more fully with their men in meeting the increasing demands of social and economic conditions.

At this stage in the international struggle of ideologies, where time seems to be running short, it is becoming mandatory that men and women alike coordinate their efforts nationally and internationally to improve depressed social and economic conditions—the underlying cause of unrest and instability. Only in this way can world freedom be preserved and a better life be assured for all.

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